

American Surgical
Association 1894

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT.

BY J. EWING MEARS, M.D.,
OF PHILADELPHIA.

HONORED by your choice as the presiding officer on the occasion of the present meeting, it has been a subject of some consideration in what manner that part of my duty which pertains to the opening of the session could be most acceptably discharged. A review of the addresses of the presiding officers since the foundation of the Association makes it evident that, on this subject, different views have been entertained by the occupants of the chair. As the character of the address is not prescribed by the By-laws, it would seem proper to have the occasion used as the judgment of the officer may decide. Under such conditions a variety in the character of the addresses will obtain. While it has been suggested that the President's Address shall be scientific in character, devoted to the discussion of some special subject or shall present a *résumé* of the progress of surgery, it is important that at certain intervals of time the affairs of the Association should receive attention at the hands of the presiding officer. The scientific work of the Association cannot be successfully accomplished unless the machinery of the organization is well perfected. Each Fellow should have some knowledge of the affairs of the Association, and he should fully appreciate the responsibility which rests upon him in maintaining its character and promoting its welfare. With your permission, and, I trust, with your approval as well, I shall occupy a few moments in the discussion of certain matters relative to the affairs of the Association which I deem of sufficient importance to be submitted to your consideration.

The Association has reached, it may be truly said, a period in its history when we can study with instruction what it has accomplished, and on the results base our expectations of the future. The history of its work is told in its volumes of *Transactions*. As a matter of record, some detailed statements may be made with regard to ten of these volumes of which I was editor, which will perhaps prove of interest.

The form, shape, and style of a book are, as is well known, not the least of its merits. In some instances these alone receive commendation at the hands of the critic. Whatever may be the judgment as to the habiliment adopted for our volume of *Transactions*, it received the commendation of the Founder of the Association, who at the time of the issue of the first volume expressed satisfaction with the binding, and placed an injunction, in a note to the editor, on the cutting of the leaves. Notwithstanding the resolution adopted at the meeting of the Association in 1882, directing the publication of a volume of *Transactions* only if the material on hand would form a volume of 450 octavo pages, it has been deemed expedient to publish a volume each year containing the material of the annual meeting. In only two instances has the number of pages of the volume equalled that set forth in the resolution—volumes one and nine. One volume, number seven, contained exactly one-half the prescribed number of pages. The number of papers in each volume has varied from eleven to thirty-two, the total number in the ten volumes being one hundred and ninety-one, contributed by eighty-three Fellows.

While it is difficult to classify accurately the subjects of the papers, it may be stated that operative and therapeutic surgery claimed the larger number. Nine papers were devoted to experimental inquiries.

Fifty subjects were discussed in the one hundred and ninety-one papers. Of these subjects, the surgery of the brain, kidney, bladder, and intestine claimed the larger number of papers. Operations on the arteries, hernia, and fractures come next in point of number. Antiseptic surgery was treated in six papers. To the appendix vermiciformis, a part of the economy

now receiving so much attention at the surgeon's hands, three papers were devoted. The bacteriology of surgical diseases received treatment in four papers. Without further particularization, it may be stated that the remaining papers were devoted to the discussion of surgical subjects of importance, involving the different parts and organs of the body. Considering the geographical distribution of the work done among those who, in the period of time embraced by the issue of the ten volumes, constituted the Fellowship of the Association, it is ascertained that Fellows from the East contributed forty-eight of the papers, from the West twenty-two, and from the South thirteen. This is in proper proportion to the membership from the different portions of the country, and indicates the general interest taken in the scientific work of the Association.

In reviewing some of the papers it is interesting to note the progress made in surgical methods in the time covered by the volumes. This is notably true with regard to the subject of antiseptic surgery. When this subject was presented at the meeting the proceedings of which were recorded in the first volume, the discussion which followed was of a character to indicate that the system of antiseptic surgery at that time had but few advocates in our body. Many of the participants in the discussion felt called upon to disclaim that they or the surgeons in this and in that city, and in this or in that part of the country, employed the system or in any manner approved of it. The author of one of the papers in closing the discussion said the great objections came not from those who have tried Listerism, but from those who are willing to raise their hands and thank God that they have never witnessed its application nor used it. By one, prophetic words were uttered to the effect that antiseptic methods in surgery were not dead, but that we were yet to hear more of them.

I think it may be stated as true that the character of the scientific work which has thus far existed in the Association has been due to the system early adopted of the assignment of subjects of leading importance to a limited number of Fellows for the preparation of papers and the formulation of propositions

for discussion. This duty, at first belonging to the President, has been wisely delegated to a Business Committee. In relieving the President of the duty of providing business for the meeting over which he was to preside it removed from him an onerous duty and a task not altogether congenial. The duty was therefore properly given to a committee; with the belief that in its hands the business would receive the attention demanded by its importance. This committee, as constituted, includes the President, Secretary, Recorder (*ex-officio*), and two Fellows. My experience as a member, for some time, of this committee, leads me to make certain suggestions with regard to the manner in which its duties should be performed. The committee should have its organization, and its duties should be defined by the By-laws. It should be required to hold stated meetings during the year and present a report of its work at each annual meeting. The entire scientific business of each meeting, as well as the publication of the volumes of *Transactions*, should be confided to its care. The scope of the work of the committee might with advantage be extended, including not only the assignment of the limited special subjects for presentation and discussion at each meeting, but authority might be given it to appoint, after approval by the Association, special committees to prepare from time to time exhaustive reports upon subjects of interest. It might further assist in obtaining scientific work of good character if the committee should have prepared a list of at least one dozen subjects for presentation at each meeting of the Association, from which the six special subjects for the next meeting may be chosen by vote of the Association. It would also be well to request the Fellows of the Association to send to the committee a list of subjects which they think desirable for discussion, and at any meeting it would be of service if any Fellow should by motion request the Business Committee to receive for consideration and action any topic he may desire to be brought before it for discussion. If the limited special subjects are chosen on report of the committee at the meeting preceding the one at which they are to be discussed, it will afford ample

time for the Fellows of the Association to consider the topics and to prepare papers having a relation to them.

The question as to the assignment of the subjects presents some difficulties. Shall the subject be assigned to the Fellow chosen to present it, or shall the Fellow be requested to make choice out of the number in the hands of the committee? It can be readily understood that in some instances the Fellow would find a congenial task in the subject assigned—a topic in which he happens to be especially interested; in other instances it might not be so. Therefore it would be well to assign the subject after consultation with the Fellow, as is now provided for. In order to insure prompt publication of the volume of *Transactions*, Fellows presenting papers should prepare at least two copies, one of which should be delivered at the time of reading to the Business Committee.

The list of Honorary Fellows includes many of the most distinguished surgeons of Europe—authors, teachers, and practitioners of surgery. Each year a certain number of these should be invited to contribute papers on subjects of their own choice, or to take part by written contributions in the discussion of chosen subjects. By such a plan the interest of our meetings will be greatly increased and our volumes of *Transactions* enriched.

The work of the Business Committee is of the gravest importance. The success of the meeting depends upon the manner in which its duty is performed; the character of the work of the Association rests in its hands, and the Fellow accepting service as one of its members should be willing to give all of the time and attention which a proper performance of its duties demands.

As well there rests upon the Fellow accepting duty as a contributor to the programme of a meeting, an important duty with the performance of which nothing, so far as may be possible, should be permitted to interfere.

The question of Fellowship in the Association has been the subject of consideration from time to time, presented through the introduction of amendments to the Constitution, having for their object the extension of the limit fixed and the change in the

number of votes necessary to exclude the candidate from Fellowship. In considering these propositions it is desirable to bear in mind the intention of the Founder of this Association. The object was distinctly stated to be "to found a national surgical society to consist exclusively of distinguished surgical practitioners, writers, and teachers;" it was to bring representative surgeons from the centres of surgical thought, teaching, and practice in this country into council; its organization was to be on a plan different from any existing surgical society; its work was intended to be of a higher order than that of any existing body. It was to be the Senate of the surgical profession of this country, into which the great questions in surgery were to be brought for discussion and decision. In order that it should accomplish the purpose of its creation, it was necessary that its Fellowship should be limited; that it should be representative in character; that its conditions of admission should be exacting, not to be used for the purpose of excluding meritorious candidates, but to prove their qualifications.

The experience of the past has demonstrated that the limit fixed is sufficient for the work of the Association. At no time since its foundation has the limit been filled, and there now exist eighteen vacancies. If in the past a duly qualified candidate, qualified in all respects, has been excluded on personal grounds; if action has been inspired by motives other than those which are intended to conserve the best interests of the Association, then we have been unfaithful to the trust transmitted to our keeping. In the selection of Fellows we should keep constantly in mind the standard of excellence fixed by our organic law, and we shall do our duty only by a strict and impartial adherence to it. Furthermore, it is to be borne in mind that the Association was designed to be national in character. All parts of this great country were to be represented in the Association. Our large centres in the East naturally present a larger number in proportion, but in making choice of candidates consideration should be given to the representation from other parts. At the time of the organization of the Association the original Fellows numbered forty-seven. Of these a geographi-

cal distribution gave twenty-three (49 per cent.) from the East, thirteen (29 per cent.) from the West, and ten (22 per cent.) from the South. In the past thirteen years—which mark the active life of the Association—ninety-one Fellows have been elected, of which number sixty (66 per cent.) represent the East, nineteen (20 per cent.) the West, and twelve (14 per cent.) the South. Of the total Fellowship, 137, since the foundation, the percentage is: 60 per cent., 21 per cent., 19 per cent. At this time the list of eighty-three Fellows includes fifty-four (65 per cent.) from the East, nineteen (23 per cent.) from the West, and ten (12 per cent.) from the South. This proportion in the Fellowship marks a decided increase in the percentage in favor of the East over that in the number of original Fellows and of the total Fellowship. In the election of Fellows in the future regard should be paid to the geographical distribution, if it is possible, in order that the national character of our Association shall be maintained.

The selection of candidates for Fellowship is a matter of so much importance that it seems desirable some method different from that which now obtains could, with advantage, be adopted. This might be accomplished with due regard to the interests of both the Association and the candidates by the formation of a Committee on Membership, whose duty it should be to request from the Fellows the names of those deemed to be eligible for Fellowship or Honorary Fellowship, or to adopt any plan regarded proper to bring before it the names of those who come within the qualifications demanded by the Constitution. This committee should have charge of all matters relating to the nomination of candidates for Fellowship. All papers now required to be deposited with the Council relating to the nomination of candidates should be placed in the hands of this committee for its action. It should be organized by the election of proper officers, and hold stated meetings during the year, and should send to the Fellows, at least three months before a meeting, the list of candidates eligible for election, with such information as may be proper to communicate.

The question of the number of votes required to exclude a

candidate from Fellowship is one of grave import. As fixed by the Constitution it is stated as not more than three—a limit deemed essential to the protection of the interests of the Association created with its purposes. To have a Fellowship without limit as to number, and to open widely the door of admission, would defeat at once the intentions of the Founder of the Association. Such an Association would have no distinctive character; it would in nowise be anything more than others already in existence.

Another question to which I beg to call the attention of Fellows is that of the place and time of meeting of the Association. With the exception of five meetings of the thirteen which have been held the Association has met at Washington and in the spring of the year, except at the time of the meeting of the Congress. The reasons in favor of having Washington alone as the place of meeting are: 1. Its accessibility from all parts of the country. 2. The conditions which surround it as the capital of the country. 3. The opportunity presented of having in that city meetings independent of any local conditions, and in which there can be no interference with the prompt execution of the business of the meetings. 4. The identification of the Association as a national body with the nation's capital.

The principal reason assigned for the change in the place of meeting is the opportunity afforded of studying in the different places college and hospital construction, arrangements of operative amphitheatres, clinical methods, sanitary systems of cities, and other matters of general and local interest. In arriving at a decision with regard to the subject, it is important to consider whether these compensate for the interference with the proper transaction of the business of the Association which almost certainly follows. In addition there is always, it may be said, a liberal accompaniment of social festivities, which is apt to disturb the execution of the business programme.

The time of meeting is also coming to be a matter for consideration. The change in the collegiate year of the medical institutions makes both the early spring and late fall

in some respects unfavorable times for meeting; midsummer cannot be chosen as favorable except for meetings at seaside or mountain resorts. The midwinter season—between Christmas and the New Year—might for some reasons be considered as favorable, but would undoubtedly receive objection on account of interference with the professional business of the practitioner.

I have thus ventured to call your attention to certain matters relating to the affairs of the Association, believing that there is need of some action to be taken with regard to them. The Constitution and By-laws have required amendment to meet the conditions arising as a result of the growth and development of the Association. I suggest that a committee on its revision shall be appointed at this meeting to incorporate the amendments adopted from time to time, and to present for consideration and action such additional amendments as in its judgment may be deemed necessary.

Fellows of the Association: To-day we meet as one of the constituent societies of the Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons—a body which had its birth within our fold; a body which brings into union the active workers of our noble profession; the delvers in the mines of medical science; the exponents of medical progress in our country. Does not the experience of the past and our knowledge of the day justify us in the opinion that the creation of this body was an act of wisdom, and are we not, as members of the American medical profession, proud of its achievements? Let us place our contributions upon the altar of Science, worthy of the time and occasion, and let us go forward with the work of our Association, imbued with the spirit of its Founder and mindful ever of its high mission.

CLOSING REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT.

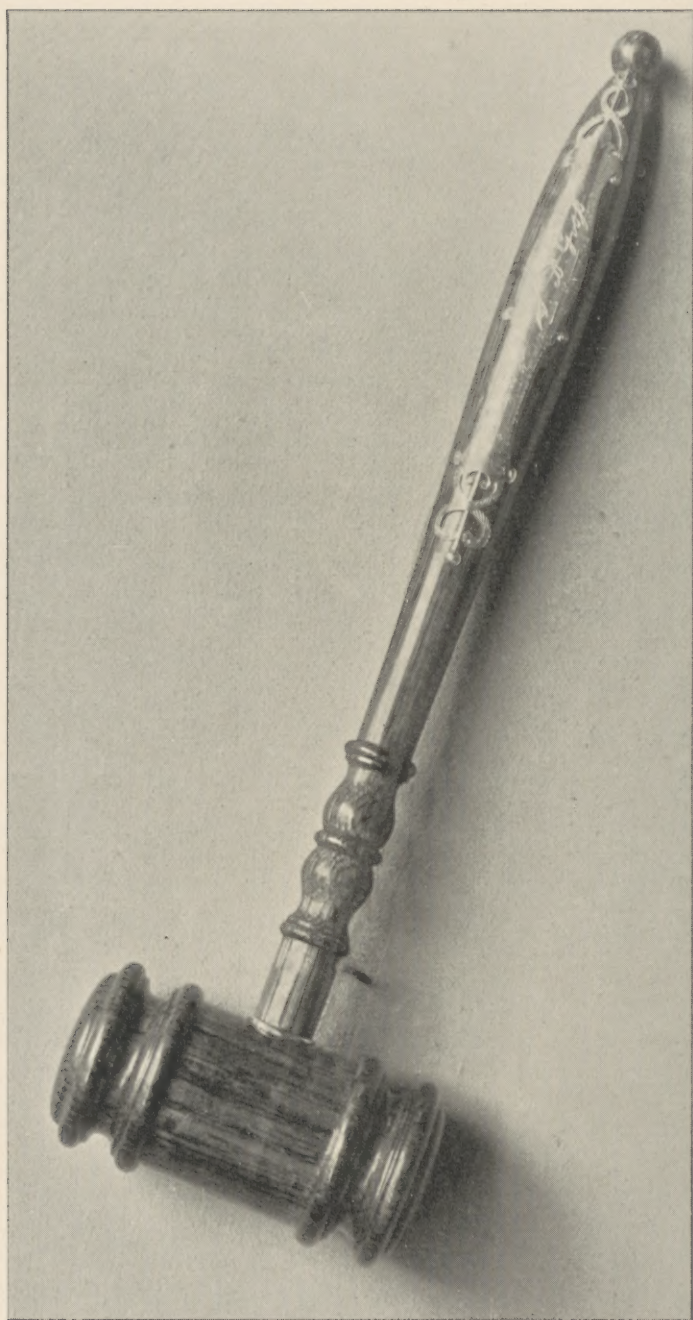
FELLOWS: It remains for me, as your President, to announce the final adjournment of the meeting of the Association. In doing so I feel it proper to speak briefly of what we have done, of some of the conditions which have surrounded us, and of some of the subjects presented to us on this occasion.

If I mistake not, the number in attendance is quite as large as at any previous meeting of the Association. The programme has been ample for the occasion. In its preparation an effort was made to bring forward for discussion some of the new and important subjects in surgery claiming attention at this time. This, I think, has been accomplished to a certain extent, and as a result the character of the work has been of a high order and such as belongs to our Association. I mention this not to take to ourselves any special credit or to claim any special commendation, but simply that it may be noted, and that we may be encouraged to continue to maintain the high standard of work for the accomplishment of which this Association was organized.

In accepting the position of the presiding officer of the Association I did so with a full knowledge of the responsibilities of the office and with a full knowledge of its dignity and its importance.

I felt I could not discharge my duty without receiving, what has been so generously bestowed, the indulgence of the Fellows during the sessions just held, and the assistance which they have rendered me during the year of preparation. For these I desire to return my sincere and heartfelt thanks.

I now announce the adjournment of the Association.



PRESENTATION OF GAVEL.

The Secretary, DR. WEIST, asked permission to delay the regular order of business for a moment. This being granted, he said :

“ Fellows of the Association, I have an agreeable duty to perform. The President, Dr. Mears, who has labored so long and faithfully in our interests, places us to-day under new obligations. I hold in my hand a beautiful gavel which he has had made and now desires to have presented to the Association for the use of its future Presidents.

“ The instrument is made of oak ornamented with gold. Its beauty and usefulness make it a valuable gift. When, however, I read the inscription, engraved in gold upon the handle, you will discover that for the Association it has a value far beyond that attaching to it as a creation of art. The inscription informs us that the wood of which it is made was formerly a part of the office-chair of the distinguished and loved Founder of the American Surgical Association, Samuel D. Gross. At the mention of this name you are overwhelmed with emotion, remembering as you do how pre-eminently it is connected with American surgery, and the personal association had with him who bore it while he was organizing and carrying into successful execution a plan for an Association designed to make American surgery known and respected throughout the world. While, at our meetings our Founder is ever present in our memories, when we see this gavel in the hands of the President we shall feel that through it something of him is present in a tangible form, and surely in the future those into whose hands we place it as an emblem of authority will ever remember to emulate the master of our art in labor for the honor and usefulness of our Association.

“ Gentlemen, I move that the gavel be accepted and the thanks of the Association be tendered to Dr. Mears for his priceless gift.”

The motion was put and carried unanimously.

